

1 Corinthians 6:12

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of self-control over appetites and the hope of resurrection in living a life that honors God.

Scripture: Philippians 3:19

Topics: "Self Control", "Christian Living"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of self-control and moderation, emphasizing that while all things may be lawful, not all things are expedient or beneficial. He warns against being enslaved by desires such as gluttony, which can lead to other sins like fornication. Chrysostom encourages believers to avoid excess and not allow themselves to be controlled by their appetites, highlighting the need to maintain mastery over one's actions and not be enslaved by indulgence.

Transcript

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought into the power of any.

Here he glances at the gluttons. For since he intends to assail the fornicator again, and fornication arises from luxuriousness and want of moderation, he strongly chastises this passion. It cannot be that he speaks thus with regard to things forbidden, such not being lawful: but of things which seem to be indifferent. To illustrate my meaning: It is lawful, he says, to eat and to drink; but it is not expedient with excess. And so that marvellous and unexpected turn of his, which he is often wont to adopt; Cf. Romans 12:21; 1 Corinthians 7:23 bringing his argument clear round to its contrary, this he manages to introduce here also; and he signifies that to do what is in one's power not only is not expedient, but even is not a part of power, but of slavery.

And first, he dissuades them on the ground of the inexpediency of the thing, saying, they are not expedient: in the next place, on that of its contrariety to itself, saying, I will not be brought under the power of any. This is his meaning: You are at liberty to eat, says he; well then, remain in liberty, and take heed that you do not become a slave to this appetite: for he who uses it properly, he is master of it; but he that exceeds the proper measure is no longer its master but its slave, since gluttony reigns paramount within him. Do you perceive how, where the man thought he had authority Paul points out that he is under authority? For this is his custom, as I was saying before, to give all objections a turn the contrary way. It is just this which he has done here. For mark; each of them was saying, I have power to live luxuriously. He

replies, In doing so, you are not so much acting as one who had power over a thing, but rather as being yourself subject to some such power. For you have not power even over your own belly, so long as you are dissolute, but it has power over you. And the same we may say both of riches and of other things.

1 Corinthians 6:13

Meats for the belly. By the belly here he means not the stomach, but the stomach's voraciousness. As when he says, Philippians 3:19 Whose God is their belly: not speaking about that part of the body, but about greediness. To prove that so it is, hear what follows: And the belly for meats; but the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord. And yet the belly also is of the body. But he puts down two pairs of things, meats and gluttony, (which he terms the belly;) Christ, and the body.

What then is the meaning of, Meats for the belly? Meats, he says, are on good terms with gluttony, and it with them. It cannot therefore lead us unto Christ, but drags towards these. For it is a strong and brutal passion, and makes us slaves, and puts us upon ministering to the belly. Why then are you excited and gaping after food, O man? For the end of that service is this, and nothing further shall be seen of it: but as one was waiting on some mistress, it abides keeping up this slavery, and advances no further, and has no other employment but this same fruitless one. And the two are connected together and destroyed together; the belly with the meats, and the meats with the belly; winding out a sort of interminable course; just as from a corrupt body worms may be produced, and again by worms the body consumed; or as it were a wave swoln high and breaking, and having no further effect. But these things he says not concerning food and the body, but it is the passion of greediness and excess in eatables which he is censuring: and what follows shows it. For he proceeds:

But God shall bring to nought both it and them: speaking not of the stomach, but of immoderate desire: not of food but of high feeding. For with the former he is not angry, but even lays down rules about them, saying, 1 Timothy 6:8 Having food and covering we shall be therewith content. However, thus he stigmatizes the whole thing; its amendment (after advice given) being left by him to prayer.

But some say that the words are a prophecy, declaring the state which shall be in the life to come, and that there is no eating or drinking there. Now if that which is moderate shall have an end, much more ought we to abstain from excess.

Then lest any one should suppose that the body is the object of his censure, and suspect that from a part he is blaming the whole, and say that the nature of the body was the cause of gluttony or of fornication, hear what follows. I blame not, he says, the nature of the body, but the immoderate license of the mind. And therefore he subjoins, Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; for it was not formed for this purpose, to live riotously and commit fornication, as neither was the belly to be greedy; but that it might follow Christ as a Head, and that the Lord might be set over the body. Let us be overcome with shame, let us be horror-struck, that after we have been counted worthy of such great honor as to become members of Him that sits on high, we defile ourselves with so great evils.

2. Having now sufficiently condemned the glutton, he uses also the hope of things to come to divert us from this wickedness: saying,

1 Corinthians 6:14

And God both raised up the Lord, and will raise up us also through His power.

Do you perceive again his Apostolical wisdom? For he is always establishing the credibility of the Resurrection from Christ, and especially now. For if our body be a member of Christ, and Christ be risen, the body also shall surely follow the Head.

Through his power. For since he had asserted a thing disbelieved and not to be apprehended by reasonings, he has left entirely to His incomprehensible power the circumstances of Christ's own Resurrection, producing this too as no small demonstration against them. And concerning the Resurrection of Christ he did not insert this: for he did not say, And God shall also raise up the Lord; -- for the thing was past and gone -- but how? And God both raised up the Lord; nor was there need of any proof. But concerning our resurrection, since it has not yet come to pass, he spoke not thus, but how? And will raise up us also through His power: by the reliance to be placed on the power of the Worker, he stops the mouths of the gainsayers.

Further: if he ascribe unto the Father the Resurrection of Christ, let not this at all disturb you. For not as though Christ were powerless, has he put this down, for He it is Himself who says, John 2:19 Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up: and again, John 10:18 I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again. And Luke also in the Acts says, cf. Acts 1:3 To whom also He showed Himself alive. Wherefore then does Paul so speak? Because both the acts of the Son are imputed unto the Father, and the Father's unto the Son. For He says, John 5:19 Whatsoever things He does, these the Son also does in like manner.

And very opportunely he here made mention of the Resurrection, keeping down by those hopes the tyranny of gluttonous desire; and all but saying, You have eaten, hast drunk to excess: and what is the result? Nothing, save only destruction. You have been conjoined unto Christ; and what is the result? A great and marvellous thing: the future Resurrection, that glorious one, and transcending all utterance!

3. Let no one therefore go on disbelieving the Resurrection: but if a man disbelieve, let him think how many things He made from nothing, and admit it as a proof also of the other. For the things which are already past are stranger by far, and fraught with overpowering wonder. Just consider. He took earth and mixed it, and made man; earth which existed not before this. How then did the earth become man? And how was it produced from nothing? And, how, all the things that were made from it? The endless sorts of irrational creatures; of seeds; of plants; no pangs of travail having preceded in the one case, no rains having come down upon the others; no tillage seen, no oxen, no plough, nor any thing else contributing to their production? Why, for this cause the lifeless and senseless thing was made to put forth in the beginning so many kinds of plants and irrational creatures, in order that from the very first He might instruct you in the doctrine of Resurrection. For this is more inexplicable than the Resurrection. For it is not the same thing to rekindle an extinguished lamp, and to show fire that has never yet appeared. It is not the same thing to raise up again a house which has fallen down, and to produce one which has never at all had an existence. For in the former case, if nothing else, yet the material was given to work with: but in the latter, not even the substance appeared. Wherefore He made first that which seemed to be the more difficult, to the end that hereby you might admit that which is the more easy; more difficult, I say, not to God, but as far as our reasonings can follow the subject. For with God nothing is difficult: but as the painter who has made one likeness will make ten thousand with ease, so also with God it is easy to make worlds without number and end. Rather, as it is easy for you to conceive a city and worlds without bound, so unto God is it easy to make them; or rather again it is easier by far. For you consume time, brief though it be, in your conception; but God not even this, but as much as stones are heavier than any of the lightest things, yea even than our minds; so much is our mind surpassed by the rapidity of God's work of creation.

Do you marvel at His power on the earth? Think again how the heaven was made, not yet being; how the innumerable stars, how the sun, how the moon; and all these things not yet being. Again, tell me how after they were made they stood fast, and upon what? What foundation have they? And what the earth? What comes next to the earth? And again, what after that which came next to the earth? Do you see into what an eddy the eye of your mind is plunged, unless you quickly take refuge in faith and the incomprehensible power of the Maker?

But if you choose from human things also to make conjecture, you will be able by degrees to find wings for your understanding. What kind of human things? may be asked. Do you not see the potters, how they fashion the vase which had been broken in pieces and become shapeless? Those who fuse the ore from the mine, how the earth in their hands turns out (τῶν γὰρ χρυσίον ποφάγουσι) gold, or silver, or copper? Others again who work in glass, how they transform the sand into one compact and transparent substance? Shall I speak of the dressers of leather, the dyers of purple vestments; how they make that which had received their tint show as one thing, when it had been another? Shall I speak of the generation of our own race? Does not a small seed, at first without form and impress, enter into the womb which receives it? Whence then the so intricate formation of the living creature? What is the wheat? Is it not cast a naked seed into the earth? After it has been cast there, does it not decay? Whence is the ear, the beard, the stalk, and all the other parts? Does not often a little grain of a fig fall into the ground, and produce both root, and branches, and fruit? And do you hereupon admit each of these and make no curious enquiries, and of God alone do you demand account, in His work of changing the fashion of our body? And how can such things be pardonable?

These things and such like we say to the Greeks. For to those who are obedient to the Scriptures, I have no occasion to speak at all.

I say, if you intend to pry curiously into all His doings, what shall God have more than men? And yet even of men there are many about whom we do not so enquire. Much more then ought we to abstain from impertinent inquiry about the wisdom of God, and from demanding accounts of it: in the first place, because He is trustworthy who affirms: in the second place, because the matter admits not investigation by reasonings. For God is not so abjectly poor as to work such things only as can be apprehended by the weakness of your reasonings. And if you comprehend not the work of an artisan, much less of God, the best of artificers. Disbelieve not then the Resurrection, for very far will you be from the hope of that which is to come.

But what is the wise argument of the gain-sayers; rather, I should say, their exceeding senseless one? Why how, when the body is mixed up with the earth and has become earth, and this again is removed elsewhere, how, say they, shall it rise again? To you this seems impossible, but not to the unsleeping Eye. For unto that all things are clear. And thou in that confusion see no distinction of parts; but He knows them all. Since also the heart of your neighbor you know not, nor the things in it; but He knows all. If then, because of your not knowing how God raises men up, you believe not that He does raise them, will you disbelieve that He knows also what is in your mind? For neither is that obvious to view. And yet in the body it is visible matter, though it be dissolved: but those thoughts are invisible. Shall He then who knows with all certainty the invisible things, not see the things which be visible, and easily distinguish the scattered parts of the body? I suppose this is plain to every one.

Do not then disbelieve the Resurrection; for this is a doctrine of the Devil. This is what the Devil is earnest for, not only that the Resurrection may be disbelieved, but good works also may be done away with. For

the man who does not expect that he shall rise again and give an account of the things which he has done, will not quickly apply himself to virtue; will in turn come to disbelieve the Resurrection entirely: for both these are established by each other; vice by unbelief, and unbelief by vice. For the conscience filled with many wickednesses, fearing and trembling for the recompense to come and not willing to provide itself with comfort by changing to what is most excellent, is fain to repose in unbelief. Thus when you deny resurrection and judgment, the other for his part will say, Then shall I also not have to render account of my bold deeds.

4. But why says Christ? Matthew 22:29 You do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For God would not have wrought so many things, had He intended not to raise us up again, but to dissolve and blot us out in annihilation. He would not have spread out this heaven, He would not have stretched the earth beneath, He would not have made all the rest of the universe only for this short life. But if all these are for the present, what will He not do for that which is to come? If, on the contrary, there is to be no future life, we are in this respect of far meaner account than the things which have been made for our sakes. For both the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and the rivers, are more lasting than we are: and some even of the brutes; since the raven, and the race of elephants, and many other creatures, have a longer enjoyment of the present life. To us, moreover, life is both short and toilsome, but not to them. Theirs is both long, and freer from grief and cares.

What then? Tell me: has he made the slaves better than the masters? Do not, I beseech you, do not reason thus, O man, nor be so poverty-stricken in mind, nor be ignorant of the riches of God, having such a Master. For even from the beginning God desired to make you immortal, but thou were not willing. Since the things also of that time were dark hints of immortality: the converse with God; the absence of uneasiness from life; the freedom from grief, and cares, and toils, and other things which belong to a temporary existence. For Adam had no need either of a garment or a shelter, or any other provision of this sort; but rather was like to the Angels; and many of the things to come he foreknew, and was filled with great wisdom. Even what God did in secret, he knew, I mean with regard to the woman: wherefore also he said, This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. Genesis 2:23 Labor came into being afterwards: so did sweat, so did shame, and cowardice, and want of confidence. But on that day there was no grief, nor pain, nor lamentation. But he abode not in that dignity.

What then, says one, am I to do? Must I perish on his account? I reply, first, It is not on his account: for neither have you remained without sin: though it be not the same sin, at least there is some other which you have committed. And again, you have not been injured by his punishment, but rather have been a gainer. For if you had been to remain altogether mortal, perchance what is said would have had some reason in it. But now you are immortal, and if you will, you may shine brighter than the sun itself.

5. But, says one, had I not received a mortal body, I had not sinned. Tell me then, had he a mortal body when he sinned? Surely not: for if it had been mortal before, it would not have undergone death as a punishment afterwards. And that a mortal body is no hindrance to virtue, but that it keeps men in order and is of the greatest service, is plain from what follows. If the expectation of immortality alone so lifted up Adam; had he been even immortal in reality, to what a pitch of arrogance would he not have proceeded? And as things are, after sinning you may do away with your sins, the body being abject, falling away, and subject to dissolution: for these thoughts are sufficient to sober a man. But if you had sinned in an immortal body, your sins were likely to have been more lasting.

Mortality then is not the cause of sin: accuse it not: but the wicked will is the root of all the mischief. For why was not Abel at all the worse for his body? Why are the devils not at all the better for being incorporeal? Will you hear why the body's becoming mortal, so far from hurting, has been positively useful? Mark how much you gain thereby, if you are sober. It drags you back and pulls you off from wickedness, by griefs and pains and labors and other such things. But it tempts men to uncleanness, perhaps you will say. Not the body, but incontinence, does this. For all these things which I was mentioning certainly do belong to the body: on which account it is impossible that a man who has entered into this life should escape disease and pain and lowness of spirits: but that he commit no uncleanness is possible. Thus it appears that if the affections of vice were part of the nature of the body they would be universal: since all things natural are so; but to commit fornication is not so. Pain indeed comes of nature: but to commit fornication proceeds from deliberate purpose.

Blame not the body then; let not the Devil take away your honor, which God has given you. For if we choose, the body is an excellent bridle to curb the wanton sallies of the soul, to pull down haughtiness, to repress arrogance, to minister to us in the greatest achievements of virtue. For tell me not of those who have lost their senses; since we often see horses, after they have thrown out their drivers, dashing with their reins over the precipices, and yet we do not blame the rein. For it is not the breaking of that which caused it all, but the driver not holding them in was the ruin of every thing. Just so do thou reason in this case. If you see a young person living in orphanhood and doing innumerable evil things, blame not the body, but the charioteer who is dragged on, I mean, the man's faculty of reasoning. For as the reins give no trouble to the charioteer, but the charioteer is the cause of all the mischief through his not holding them properly: (and therefore do they often exact a penalty of him, entangling themselves with him, and dragging him on, and compelling him to partake in their own mishap:) so is it also in the case before us. I, say the reins, made bloody the horse's mouth as long as you held me: but since you threw me away, I require satisfaction for your contempt, and I entwine myself about you, and drag you along, so as not to incur the same usage again. Let no one then blame the reins, but himself and his own corrupt mind. For over us too is a charioteer, even reason: and the reins are the body, connecting the horses with the charioteer; if then these be in good condition, you will suffer no harm: but if you let them go, you have annihilated and ruined every thing. Let us be temperate then, and lay all blame not on the body, but on the evil mind. For this is the Devil's special work, to make foolish men accuse the body and God and their neighbor, rather than their own perverted minds; lest, having discovered the cause, they get free from the root of the evils.

But do ye, being aware of his design, direct your wrath against him: and having set the charioteer upon the car, bend the eye of your minds towards God. For in all other instances he that appoints the games contributes nothing, but only awaits the end. But in this case, He is all in all, who appointed the contest, even God. Him therefore let us render propitious, and surely we shall obtain the blessings in store; through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory, power, honor, now, henceforth, and for evermore. Amen.

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